

LOS ANGELES TIMES

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A-11 Flights Reported Over Red Territory

Statement in Aviation
Journal Stirs Capital;
Official Denies Missions

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Exclusive to The Times from the New York News

WASHINGTON—A report that the secretly developed 2,000-m.p.h. A-11 jet interceptor, first described a week ago by President Johnson, "has already flown long-range reconnaissance missions over Communist territory" drew wide attention in Washington Sunday night.

The authoritative trade magazine Aviation Week and Space Technology, known to have had full details on the world's fastest jet for more than a year, said that "during operations over the last two years it has proved this ability to outfly any air defense system now in operational use." The A-11 had been under secret wraps for five years.

There was no further elaboration of the "over Communist territory" description of the plane's flight history.

No Official Word

But the flat, unqualified statement that the A-11 had tested and mastered "any air defense systems" was a clear indication that the plane had flown in the vicinity of the best Russian anti-aircraft weapons.

No official confirmation could be obtained. Because of the explosive nature of the information, it was expected that formal denials would be forthcoming.

(The Associated Press, reporting from Washington, quoted one high official as saying, "The A-11 has not flown any reconnaissance missions over Communist territory." The official declined use of his name.)

After CIA pilot Francis Gary Powers was downed in Russia with his U-2 spy plane substantially intact and the four-year overflight operations revealed to the world, President Dwight D. Eisenhower promised Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev that the U-2 program would be suspended.

President John F. Kennedy, at his first news conference on Jan. 25, 1961, affirmed that his administration would honor the Eisenhower pledge.

But the A-11 is not the U-2.

Crew of Three

Aviation Week revealed that the A-11 will fly at a speed of mach 3.5, or approximately 2,400 m.p.h., and can maintain a better-than-twice the speed of sound up to 100,000 ft.

The range is described as "considerably in excess of the U-2's 4,000-mile capability."

The aircraft is designed for a crew of three, a pilot and co-pilot seated in tandem at the front with the third crewman, who operates special electronic equipment, seated behind with vision through a small porthole.

The magazine said that Lockheed won a design competition to build a successor to the F-2 with Convair, Boeing and North American Aviation as its competitors.

The Lockheed entry—the A-11—is a company, not military designation, was prepared by Clarence L. (Kelly) Johnson, who designed the F-2. Johnson made his headquarters in a maximum security area of Lockheed's Burbank, Cal., plant known as "the Skunk Works."

The first A 11 was trucked in relatively small parts to a secret Nevada base called "The Ranch." There it was assembled and flight-tested in 1961. Aviation Week said at least eight A-11s have been operating from there for two years and 50 aircraft are on order.

It was reported that the air-frame is constructed primarily of titanium alloy and the engines also use considerable titanium.

In his public announcement, President Johnson said one of the most important technological achievements has been the mastery of the metallurgy and the fabrication of titanium metal.

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What the United States has learned about metallurgy and performance at mach 3 speeds will be used in development of both a supersonic transport and future military aircraft.

Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara said last week that development of the A-11 was being continued as an interceptor aircraft. However, as it has been designed, the A-11 is relatively light in construction and most authorities believe it would not be suitable for mounting heavy armaments.

While officials denied that it had any special nuclear mission at this time, it was obvious that the A-11 could be used for special high precision atomic strikes.

The main service of the A-11, since the President has pulled off the wraps, is now expected to be as a research aircraft and a flying tester for advanced electronics systems.

While much of the aerial espionage work of the United States was believed to have been taken over by the Samos "spy" satellite, it was obvious that the fairly rigid orbital path Samos must follow would leave many gaps in intelligence. This requirement for gap-filling could have been more than fulfilled by a few hours supersonic flight by the A-11.

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